

Were You There? Witnessing Welfare Retreat

By MARI J. MATSUDA*

THIS IS an essay for Trina Grillo, in 1997, the year of Welfare Retreat. I use Welfare Retreat, not Reform, because Reform suggests that someone studied a problem and came up with a smarter way to deal with it. Retreat, in contrast, connotes turning back without gain.

The title of this essay, "Were You There?," is an allusion to an old spiritual, "Were You There When They Nailed Him to the Cross?" Trina was a great fan of music of all kinds. She believed in the power of African American religious song. This particular spiritual is disconcerting to me because I do not share the Christian faith, and this song makes it clear that the faith is at its core. There is no way to change it into a secular metaphor, to say, "It's really about freedom and I can hum over the Jesus part." Nonetheless, when I closed my eyes and called for a song to serve as the title for this essay in honor of Trina, "Were You There When They Nailed Him to the Cross?" is what I heard.

The meaning of this song is mysterious, because, of course, none of us were there in any kind of actuality. I borrow from the faith of Trina's people this song of obscure meaning, and draw from Trina's life to help understand it.

Trina, more than most of us, was There. When she was in a room, that is where she was. She could stop a conversation in its tracks by looking a friend in the eye and asking a pointed question. She could bring a posturing law professors' meeting to a standstill by saying, as I heard her say once, "I would like to point out that none of the women in this room are speaking and I would like us to talk about why that is happening."

She didn't back down from what she saw, either personally or politically. She inspires me to write about what I see happening to the poor people in my country.

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We are at a historical moment of unprecedented—and manufactured¹—bi-partisan consensus about welfare. Welfare is a wreck, and any change is for the better, the politicians have told us. At the state and the federal level, massive cutbacks in social services and income replacement are now in effect. At a time when the poor could have quite legitimately asked for an increase in benefits, given the astounding increase in the wealth of the wealthy, instead the consensus became “the poor deserve less.” This result was sold to the American public on three grounds, two explicit, and one implicit.

The two explicit grounds were that welfare is costing us too much and that welfare encourages bad behavior among the poor: too many babies, “broken” families, abandonment of the work ethic. The third, implicit ground was the promise of ideological capital to anyone not on welfare: by labeling welfare bankrupt, and by labeling people on welfare undeserving, anyone not on welfare was given automatic social status “You are better.” In the case of recent provisions cutting off various benefits for legal immigrants, a similar effect is in play.² “Citizen” suddenly has increased social, not to mention material, value, now that there is something that legally present, working, tax-paying non-citizens cannot get.

It is clear from the record of the debate preceding the end of welfare as we know it that no one in a position of power really believed that the welfare retreat would deliver on its promises. Let me tell you why “it is clear.”

First of all, the concern that government spending and the national debt are out of control is not redressed by cutting welfare, for the simple reason that the paltry sum we paid to the poor under AFDC was no more than one to two percent of federal spending.³ Furthermore, the social dislocation caused by throwing thousands of children deeper into poverty is going to generate instant increased costs. Talk to any social worker to get the

1. See Lucie E. White, *On the “Consensus” to End Welfare: Where are the Women’s Voices?*, 26 CONN. L. REV. 843 (1994).

2. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, Pub. L. No. 104-93, §§ 401–451, 110 Stat. 2107 (codified as amended in scattered sections of 8 U.S.C.) makes most legal, non-citizen immigrants ineligible for SSI or food stamps and gives states the option of denying legal immigrants Medicaid, welfare, and a variety of social services. In the current term, legislative proposals to restore benefits to some immigrants are pending. None of these proposals, however, would restore full benefits to all legal immigrants.

3. See Melynda G. Broomfield, *Controlling the Reproductive Rights of Impoverished Women: Is This the Way to “Reform” Welfare?*, 16 B.C. THIRD WORLD L.J. 217, 225 (1996) (citing *Testimony Before the Subcomm. on Human Resources, House Ways and Means Comm.*, 104th Cong. (Jan. 13, 1995) (statement of Robert Greenstein, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities)); see also Budget of the U.S. Govt., FY 1997, at 494 (actual outlays for AFDC by the most generous figure: 17,423,000,000); Budget of the U.S. Govt., FY 1998, at 306 (total budget outlays for fiscal year 1995: 1,515,729,000,000; AFDC percentage: 1.149%). Figures and calculations thanks to Ms. Karen Summerhill, Georgetown University Law Center reference librarian.

picture of the short-term costs—increased family violence, increased truancy and delinquency, more premature births and low birth weight babies, increased emergency room visits—all the things that happen when you cut off things like food or public health services to an already distressed population. In Washington, D.C., where I live, we are ending drug treatment programs and public health services,⁴ and I need not be clairvoyant to predict a crime epidemic and a TB epidemic as two short-term results.

Talk to any prison guard to get the picture of long-term costs. It is expensive to maintain prisons,⁵ and it is scary. It is difficult to contain rage safely behind bars and impossible to contain it humanely. In addition to the fixed cost of warehousing prisoners, we know that when large numbers of our citizens are non-productive we are less productive as a whole.

We also know that the best way to keep a poor child from becoming a criminal justice system statistic is to provide early intervention: Headstart, nutrition, public health, and social services to the family. Repeated longitudinal studies show the better life chances of poor children with, as compared to without, social services,⁶ yet the architects of welfare retreat argue that cutting benefits and services is beneficial. By withdrawing benefits, they argue, we create an incentive for the poor to go to work. We create an incentive for poor women to stop having babies, and to find a good, wage-earning man to marry. In this way we will end welfare and end poverty at the same time.

4. See Vernon Loeb, *Budget Strategies Target D.C.'s Most Desperate*, WASH. POST, Feb. 17, 1997, at D1.

5. See John Jacobs, *Is Prison a Good Investment?*, SACRAMENTO BEE, Aug. 13, 1995, at F4 (yearly cost of incarcerating one prisoner is between \$21,000 and \$37,000). According to the Department of Justice, the total amount spent on corrections in fiscal year 1992 was \$31,461,433,000. See SOURCEBOOK OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE STATISTICS 1995, at 3 (Kathleen Maguire & Ann L. Pasture eds., 1996).

6. See, e.g., CHARLES R. LAWRENCE III & MARI J. MATSUDA, *WE WON'T GO BACK: MAKING THE CASE FOR AFFIRMATIVE ACTION* 253–56 (1997) (examples of longitudinal studies showing the benefits of programs like Headstart and other forms of early intervention in reducing dropout rates, welfare dependency, crime rates, etc.); *Reforming the Present Welfare System: Hearing Before the Subcomm. on Department Operations, Nutrition, and Foreign Agriculture, House Comm. on Agriculture* 104th Cong. 703 (1995) (statement of Robert Greenstein, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities). In his statement, Robert Greenstein opposed block-granting of food and nutrition programs and noted increased costs associated with cutbacks in pre-natal nutrition, including a GAO study estimating that \$296 million in WIC nutrition benefits to pregnant women saves \$853 million in the first year of life and \$1.036 billion over the first 18 years of life, because inadequate early nutrition causes serious permanent health and cognitive deficits, requiring lifetime medical remediation. See *id.*

Did they really believe this? No. One out of four American children under age six live in poverty.⁷ Hunger is a constant reality for many of these children. They suffer dizziness, growth-stunting, and cognitive deficit. Our efforts to educate them come up against the wall of their hunger. They are thinking about the taste of food and the absence of food when they are supposed to sit still in the classroom and learn to read.⁸ The facts of childhood hunger, and the knowledge that welfare cutbacks would hit children first were available to Congress.

It was also well-known that the jobs did not exist to put the poor to work. Anyone who works for a living knows that job insecurity is a fact of life in America. There is not a surplus of jobs that pay a wage that one could raise a family on, and there are a lot of overqualified people ready to take those jobs. Talk to the union organizers about the clerks in bookstore chains—college graduates working for low hourly wages, often without benefits.

What job is available in this economy to a single mother without skills or a degree? Will it pay the rent as well as the childcare bill? Does it come with benefits? We ended welfare without putting in place national health care, childcare, public works programs, apprenticeship programs—in short, without doing any of the things we would do if we were really serious about getting people on welfare to go to work.

There is a racial meaning to the assumption that welfare is the reason people don't work. It represents the belief that there are certain kinds of people who don't like to work, who are naturally lazy, and who require coercion into productivity.⁹ Although most of the people on welfare are white, "welfare" is encoded with the image of people of color. It is not an accident that Charles Murray, the ideological author of welfare retreat, is also the author of the leading modern text positing the genetic inferiority of Blacks.¹⁰ Murray is wrong, as well as racist.

People want to work. The desire to live a productive life, to contribute to the social whole, to support a family, is bred in our bones and built into

7. See *The Family First Act: The Economic Effects of a \$500 Per-Child Expanded Tax Credit: Hearing Before the Joint Econ. Comm.* 104th Cong. 111 (1995) (testimony of David S. Liederman, Child Welfare League of America).

8. See *Hearing on the Contract with America: Nutrition the Local Perspective: Hearing Before House Comm. on Economic and Educational Opportunities*, 104th Cong. 3 (1995) (statement of Robert J. Ferish, Food Research and Action Center).

9. For a historical analysis of ideas, images, and conceptions of welfare recipients, see generally Gwendolyn Mink, *Welfare Reform in Historical Perspective*, 26 CONN. L. REV. 879 (1994), and Sylvia A. Law, *Women, Work, Welfare, and Preservation of Patriarchy*, 131 U. PA. L. REV. 1249 (1983).

10. See CHARLES MURRAY, *LOSING GROUND: AMERICAN SOCIAL POLICY, 1950-1980* (1984); RICHARD J. HERRNSTEIN & CHARLES MURRAY, *THE BELL CURVE* (1994).

our many cultures. The human race could not have survived without this. We enacted welfare retreat on the false core premise that certain bad people don't want to work and they must be punished for not working by taking away their means of subsistence.

Tied to the racist belief that some people "don't want to work," is the racist suggestion that some people are "having too many babies."¹¹ Racism is so culturally diffuse, as Professor Charles Lawrence has pointed out,¹² that the politicians didn't have to say "too many black and brown babies." Everyone knew who they were talking about when they pointed at the "broken family" and the "teenage mother" as the target of a whole set of punitive measures designed to cut birthrates.

Here, again, we see disinformation. First, "too many babies" is not the cause of poverty. The majority of AFDC¹³ families have one or two children.¹⁴ Furthermore, the states that pioneered the family cap—the punitive device used to keep children off AFDC—have also cut back abortion funding for poor women,¹⁵ raising the question of whether it is cutting the birth rate or political posturing that is the real reason for family caps. Furthermore, a substantial body of empirical evidence indicates that welfare benefits are NOT a motivation for having babies.¹⁶

11. See SONIA CORREA, *POPULATION AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS: FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES FROM THE SOUTH* 56–97 (1994), for a discussion of reproductive rights that includes the right of poor women to have children as well as to forego reproduction (basic needs including economic assistance and medical care are crucial in supporting reproductive rights; state population control efforts that target disfavored groups are a violation of human rights).

12. See Charles R. Lawrence III, *The Id, the Ego and Equal Protection: Reckoning with Unconscious Racism*, 39 STAN. L. REV. 317, 323 (1987).

13. Aid to Families with Dependent Children—under new legislation, this program was replaced with TANF, "Temporary Assistance to Needy Families." Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, Pub.L. No. 104-193, §§ 101–116, 110 Stat. 2105 (codified as amended in scattered sections of 42 U.S.C.).

14. See Broomfield *supra* note 3, at 221 (citing Bruce Nicholson, *Urgent Action Requested: Welfare Reform Bill Slated to House Floor*, A.B.A., Mar. 9, 1995, at 2); *AFDC Characteristics, 1969–1992*, HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMM., OVERVIEW OF ENTITLEMENT PROGRAMS 401–402 Tbl. 10-27 (Comm. Print 1994) (42% of 1992 AFDC recipient families had one child and 30.2% had 2 children, for a total of 72.7% with 1–2 children).

15. See Laura M. Friedman, *Family Cap and the Unconstitutional Conditions Doctrine: Scrutinizing a Welfare Woman's Right to Bear Children*, 56 OHIO ST. L.J. 637, 659–60 (1995) ("Each of the states which has enacted Family Cap has an anti-abortion funding statute or regulation.") (citing N.J. STAT. ANN. § 30:4D-6.1 (West 1981); WIS. STAT. ANN. § 20.927 (West 1986); ARK. CONST. of 1874, amend. 68, § 1 (1994); *Doe v. Busbie*, 481 F. Supp. 46 (N.D. Ga. 1979)).

16. See KRISTIN LUKER, *DUBIOUS CONCEPTIONS: THE POLITICS OF TEENAGE PREGNANCY* 181–93 (1996) (out of wedlock births increasing in countries that have reduced welfare benefits); see also *id.* at 126 (U.S. has high proportions of teenage mothers and lowest levels of welfare support in the industrialized world; Sweden, with one of the most generous support systems, has a low birthrate); *Welfare Reform: Views of Interested Organizations: Hearing Before the Senate Comm. on Fin.*, 104th Cong., 1st Sess. 83 (March 29, 1995) (testimony presented by David Liederman, Executive Director, Child Welfare League of America, noting that 76 leading re-

If slowing birthrates is the goal, the best way to meet that goal is providing opportunities for women. I teach at a law school where most of the women students are in their prime child bearing years, and yet they are almost without exception not having babies. Why is this? It is because they have opportunities that they perceive as threatened by the arrival of parenting responsibilities.¹⁷

Population demographers have shown this effect writ large around the world: People who are too poor to raise children comfortably are not deterred from having children.¹⁸ If pushing people into abject poverty were a way to lower birthrates, then the poorest nations wouldn't be struggling as they are with high birthrates. Birthrates go down when opportunities go up.¹⁹ More specifically, birthrates go down most significantly when opportunities go up for women.²⁰ Education and employment opportunities for women are the key way to discourage people from having children. In this regard, I see affirmative action for women as a critical element of reproductive health: an education and a decent job are what empower women to

searchers concluded that welfare benefits have minimal effect on out-of-wedlock births) (citing press release from Sheldon Danziger, et al., *Researchers Dispute Contention That Welfare Is Major Cause of Out-of-Wedlock Births*, June 23, 1994 (on file with author)).

17. Much economic literature focuses on cross-country data correlating growth in women's relative wages with fertility decline. See, e.g., Oded Galor & David N. Weil, *The Gender Gap, Fertility, and Growth*, 86 AM. ECON. REV. 374, 374 (1996). Policy analysis using interdisciplinary sources reaches similar conclusions. See, e.g., LUKER, *supra* note 16, at 116. Poverty is a risk factor for teen pregnancy; and poor teenagers living in poor neighborhoods are more likely to get pregnant than poor teenagers attending school in wealthy, suburban areas. See *id.*; see also ALAKA MALWADE BASU, *CULTURE, THE STATUS OF WOMEN, AND DEMOGRAPHIC BEHAVIOUR, ILLUSTRATED WITH THE CARE OF INDIA* (1992) (providing an empirical and ethnographic study of reproductive activity in an urban slum in India, describing economic, historical, and cultural factors that increase women's independence and decrease fertility).

18. See, e.g., BASU, *supra* note 17, at 95-103.

19. See POPULATION POLICIES RECONSIDERED: HEALTH, EMPOWERMENT, AND RIGHTS (Gita Sen et al. eds., 1994) [hereinafter POPULATION POLICIES RECONSIDERED]. "Nearly all Northern countries that have achieved population stabilization have done so through promoting better quality of life rather than explicitly trying to reduce population growth." *Id.* at 11. Compare with GENDER AND FAMILY CHANGE IN INDUSTRIALIZED COUNTRIES (Karen Oppenheim Moson & An-Magritt Jansen eds. 1995) (discussing reasons for decline in birthrates in industrialized countries). See also Galor & Weil, *supra* note 17, at 374-76.

20. See Sudhir Anand, *Population, Well-Being and Freedom*, in POPULATION POLICIES RECONSIDERED, *supra* note 19, at 82. "[T]he evidence that is emerging from study after study in developing countries shows that expanding health services and educational opportunities—for women especially—leads ultimately to significant reductions in fertility." *Id.* See also Simeen Mahmud & Anne M. Johnston, *Women's Status, Empowerment, and Reproductive Outcomes*, in POPULATION POLICIES RECONSIDERED, *supra* note 19, at 151-57 (stating that the negative correlation between women's education and fertility is well-established; the level of women's empowerment—autonomy, decision-making power, control over income, participation in women's groups—is increasingly understood as a determinate of reproductive health and reduction in birthrate).

make choices that protect their reproductive health—to have babies when they want to under conditions that maximize the health of mother, child, and family. Affirmative action has worked to empower women in this way.²¹

I must add that I reject the assumption that stopping poor people from having children is a legitimate goal. I could hardly take this position, since if poor people were not allowed to have children I would not be here, and neither would any of my fellow citizens who have poverty in their genealogy. In addition, there is social dislocation, abuse, and inadequate parenting, up and down the class scale. If our goal is to reduce the birthrate among bad parents, there is no evidence that the place to start is among the poor. Finally, the focus on birthrate as the cause of poverty obscures questions of distributional fairness. Instead of asking why the gap between rich and poor families is growing, we ask why the poor are having so many babies. Instead of asking how we can help poor families to raise healthy, happy children, we ask how we can shut them out of the profoundly human activity of procreation.

There is an important intervention here from feminist theory: the goal of punishing poor families, and in particular poor families made up of a mother and her children, comes right out of the book of patriarchy. As Martha Fineman has argued, the notion of the “broken family” as one without a father, and the notion of fixing the family by bringing back the father, would make no sense outside of the ideology of patriarchy.²² The attack on welfare mothers is a self-styled attack on marriage resisters, an attack that would make little sense without the cultural background of heterosexism and patriarchy.²³

21. See LAWRENCE & MATSUDA, *supra* note 6, at 151–177 (offering narrative examples of women increasing their economic independence through affirmative action).

22. See Martha L. Fineman, *Images of Mothers in Poverty Discourses*, 1991 DUKE L.J. 274, 287 (1991).

23. In making this claim, I anticipate the argument that children are better off in a two-parent home with a good male role model. While much alarm is expressed at the decline of the nuclear family, it is my view that children are best off in a stable, happy home and that heterosexual coupling is not the only nor the best way to achieve that state. Similarly, I believe all children should have positive relationships with male role models and this need not happen exclusively in the setting of a heterosexual nuclear family. Male coaches, teachers, mentors, extended family members, foster parents, gay male parents—there are many ways for men to care for children. Instead of punishing women who choose to live without a man, we should facilitate ways for more men to participate in nurturing children. We have done the opposite. Simultaneously with welfare retreat we have cut back the sports programs that were a traditional source of positive male interaction with children; we have cut back school loan programs that allowed men from poor families to get the education they need to become male role models; and we have engaged in an unprecedented lock-up of young minority men by criminalizing the symptoms of inner city poverty. In short, we have locked up and blockaded men who could participate in child-rearing even as we

Finally, let me address the social capital promised to working citizens out of the welfare retreat. The promise is to recognize workers as valuable, and to increase their social standing by maintaining the ideology of the undeserving poor: "You may be working a minimum wage job without benefits, but you aren't bad, like those people on welfare." The problem with this story, in addition to its dehumanizing assumption, is that the social capital is illusory. The working stiff is not suddenly entitled to respect or social equality just because we have stigmatized and punished the non-working poor. Even if we somehow did hand over this social capital—say the corporate CEOs ate lunch side-by-side with the temporary help from the mailroom—your kid still isn't going to go to school with his kid, and you aren't going to see the social capital in your paycheck.

The historical reality, as pointed out by Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, is that when the out-of-work poor get poorer, the working poor get poorer.²⁴ This is common sense. Wages paid under capitalism don't represent what a worker needs to live on; they represent what a worker can get in the market. When the market is flooded with unskilled labor, unorganized and unable to command anything other than a pittance, this drags down the wages of all workers. The welfare system, from the time of the Elizabethan poor laws, has worked hand in hand with capitalism in order to give the poor just enough to keep them from completely disrupting the social order. At the same time, the welfare system must give the poor much less than a dignified life requires, in order to make work for low wages attractive to workers.

The current welfare retreat fits into this model, and indeed Professors Cloward and Piven must feel vindicated.²⁵ At a time when American workers have the lowest union participation in modern history, and when downsizing and outsourcing is the story of the day, comes down the heavy hand of the state to punish the undeserving poor. When the new regulations are in full effect you won't need any law professor's analysis to tell you about it. You will see the hungry children yourself, coming to a city near you, this year. The message to the working poor is, "If you have any job you better be grateful," and the message to the rest of the poor is, "You are not us."

lament the loss of the nuclear family and the father figure. Cf. Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr. *Family Change and the Welfare of Children: What Do We Know and What Can We Do about It?*, in *GENDER AND FAMILY CHANGE*, *supra* note 19, at 245 (arguing that the decline of the nuclear family is complex in origin and is not the appropriate target of public intervention).

24. See FRANCES FOX PIVEN & RICHARD A. CLOWARD, *REGULATING THE POOR: THE FUNCTIONS OF PUBLIC WELFARE* (1971).

25. But see JOEL HANDLER & YEHESKEL HASENFELD, *THE MORAL CONSTRUCTION OF POVERTY* (1991) (arguing for a complex understanding of class interest that accounts for contradictory welfare policy and ideology).

I would like to conclude by re-imagining the goals of welfare reform. I, too, would like to see an end to welfare as we know it. Anyone who has walked through the waiting room at the welfare office knows it is not a humane place. Welfare is degrading and inadequate. The way to get people off welfare is to give them decent jobs, training for those jobs, and quality childcare to make work possible for parents.

There is no working woman I know, rich or poor, who is satisfied with her childcare arrangements. Other countries, like France, have managed to put in place universally available childcare programs that parents have confidence in. We could do this, and incidentally create a lot of jobs in the process of enabling parents to go to work.

When the poor go to work we have to subsidize them: provide health care, transportation, housing subsidies—whatever it takes to make work worth it. Sit down and do the math: minimum wage is not a living wage. Look in your paper for the cheapest advertised rent. Add a minimal amount for food, utilities, medical care, and transportation and see how long a minimum wage paycheck lasts. If workers can't earn enough to stay off welfare, making up the difference through subsidies will offer a return to all of us in increased productivity and social stability.

Subsidizing workers in this way is, in effect, a subsidy to the employers, just as women's unpaid work in the home is a subsidy to employers. Not only do such subsidies increase the labor pool, they also increase purchasing power, all of which redounds to the benefit of employers. Thus it is only fair that employers pick up some of this burden. The place I would start is universal health care, funded by employer contributions.

In addition, I would work to strengthen workers' bargaining power by repealing Taft-Hartley²⁶ and making it easier for unions to organize. The welfare retreat was possible because the American worker was asked, "Do you think your hard-earned tax dollars should go to pay someone who doesn't want to work?" Of course the answer was "no." It is an organized labor movement that can show the false premises in that question and ask another one: "Do you want to see your wages and benefits cut back because of the perpetuation of worldwide poverty and the maintenance of a degraded army of the unemployed?" Without a social safety net, wages are lower for all workers, and there is no quiet sleep. Most of my fellow citizens will have no or inadequate disability insurance, and no long-term care insurance for themselves or their parents. It is impossible for anyone except the very rich to provide their own social safety net. We have to make this a collective responsibility.

26. 29 U.S.C. §§ 141-197 (1994).

The gap between welfare reform as I would like to see it and the welfare retreat that our leaders gave us is large. You might think it is so large that this essay is an exercise in elite pie in the sky. My students often issue this challenge: Why do you write about utopian ideas that no one will act on? It is a real mistake to think that what we have is what we must accept. When I was a young teenager, my mother took me to a notorious housing project where she sometimes worked as a Headstart trainer. She wanted me to see a meeting run by welfare mothers, part of the National Welfare Rights Organization.²⁷ I watched these women, whom the dominant culture had taught me were lazy, inarticulate, unintelligent, and dangerous, run a mass meeting. I saw politicians come—tall figures, men who walked with the trappings of power. In Hawaii, where I lived then, one of the power symbols in the 1960s was the red double carnation lei, a five-inch-thick, showy ornament. I saw the politicians in the heavy leis listen and nod, and then step up to the microphone to express support for the women's cause. I saw something that wasn't supposed to be happening.

In my lifetime, poor people have stood up, demanded a fair share of this nation's vast wealth, and extracted significant concessions from the powerful. I was there.

Let me close with another word about Trina Grillo. She was a woman who raised two beautiful children and I defy anyone to tell me that homes like hers are "broken." She was a woman who worked with students who came from poor families and saw—in her lovingly crafted daily labors—that poverty is not a preference, but a structurally imposed burden that can end through structures of opportunity. She held her hand out to students who didn't come from wealthy families, who didn't have parents who went to college, who didn't speak English as their first language, who weren't supposed to become lawyers. Her hand reaching out changed the course of their lives, as well as her own.

Our politicians are now telling us that the way to help the poor is to stop extending that hand. The contortions of this logic ought to make us shout back in protest: leaving poor children to sleep on the streets, to hold out a hand to us begging for alms is not what will bring peace and dignity to their lives, nor to ours. Were you there? Were you there in 1997, when the richest nation in the world turned its back on the poor? With my friend, Trina Grillo, I am here and I stand in protest against this assault on justice.

27. See GUIDA WEST, *THE NATIONAL WELFARE RIGHTS MOVEMENT: THE SOCIAL PROTEST OF POOR WOMEN* (1981) for a history of the NWRO.